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EVEN AFTER KINDERGARTEN, WHAT IF THEY'RE STILL NOT READY.

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THE FLUID 1-2 PROGRAM IN THE PLAINFIELD, N.J., ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IS BRIEFLY DESCRIBED IN THIS ARTICLE. THE PROGRAM IS DESIGNED FOR CHILDREN WHO AFTER COMPLETING KINDERGARTEN HAVE READINESS PROBLEMS WHICH WILL HINDER THEIR DOING FIRST GRADE WORK. THE AIMS OF THE FLEXIBLE AND INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED PROGRAM ARE (1) TO HELP THE CHILD ADJUST TO THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE SCHOOL, (2) TO PROVIDE HIM WITH EXPERIENCES RELATED TO SCHOOL SUBJECT MATTER, (3) TO BROADEN HIS COMMAND OF ORAL LANGUAGE, (4) TO STIMULATE HIS INTEREST IN READING, AND (5) TO INTRODUCE HIM TO ESSENTIAL READING TECHNIQUES. ON COMPLETING THE PROGRAM THE CHILD CAN BE EXPECTED TO ENTER A REGULAR FIRST OR SECOND GRADE CLASS. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "GRADE TEACHER," VOLUME 83, NUMBER 1, SEPTEMBER 1965. (JL)

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# Even after kindergarten: What if they're still not ready?

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## Plainfield's "Fluid 1-2 Program" offers a way out of the old dilemma of whether to fail a child or not

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SUPPOSE that, after a year of kindergarten, a child still is not ready for the serious business of first grade. Would you hold him back? Or would you move him on to face almost certain failure in first grade?

From Plainfield, N. J., comes the same answer to both questions: No.

Either action would mean an early defeat—a failure that could put the child on an irreversible course toward dropout. In Plainfield, the child is, instead, advanced into what is known as the "Fluid 1-2 Program."

Just as Operation Headstart helps prime preschoolers for kindergarten, Fluid 1-2 fills in a missing link between kindergarten and formal schooling for youngsters who need special help.

Here's how Dr. Noble Hiebert, superintendent of schools in Plainfield, explains the plan: "The Fluid 1-2 Program has been developed to provide another interim step for those students who, if introduced into the regular stream of reading education, would probably be doomed to failure."

### Road to success

Depending on how he responds to Fluid 1-2 classes, a child may go either way—to normal second grade or to normal first. It is this flexibility that gives the program its name.

In either case, the child is back on the school mainline and, in all likelihood, is headed for at least reasonable success. This, Plainfield educators feel, is better than a school experience that is blighted from the start by the stigma of failure.

The responsibility for selecting Fluid 1-2 pupils rests with the school principals. And selections are made very carefully.

Despite their "readiness" problems, all children chosen must show normal mental, physical, and emotional growth.

"The selections," says Charles H. Detgen, principal of Emerson School, "are based on the recommendations of the kindergarten teacher and evaluation of all data concerning each possible candidate." Such data includes reports of the school nurse, psychologist, social worker, and speech therapist.

Parents are brought into the act, too. "Parent conferences," according to Mr. Detgen, "play an important part in providing understanding of the program."

### Tailor-made lessons

Success of the program hinges largely on the teachers and, according to Superintendent Hiebert, only the "most able" are selected.

One of them, Elsie Rice, of the Barlow School, points out that, in a Fluid 1-2 situation, the teacher must tailor lessons to fit the varying needs of each child.

"Most of my pupils are six years old," she says, "but their patterns of growth have many variations—fast and slow, steady and irregular—so that all of them are not ready for learning at the same time. A flexible program cannot be overemphasized if each child is to have a good start in school."

One thing all Mrs. Rice's pupils have in common: a need for a reading-readiness program. "The length and character of this program vary with the individual child," she says, "but there are certain general features." Among them:

● *Providing for adjustment to the school environment.* The children are taught such basics as proper use of classroom equipment, good listening habits, following directions.

● *Providing experiences that relate to subjects they will be reading about.* Excursions, exhibits, experiments, and audio-visual aids all play a part in this phase of the program.

● *Broadening command of oral language and forming good speech habits.* Mrs. Rice takes advantage of normal classroom activities to achieve this goal. Primarily, what she does is encourage the children to talk. They talk about their individual experiences; they talk about their group experiences; they talk about stories that have been read to them; they talk about pictures that are shown in class.

● *Arousing interest in reading.* "While many children come to school with an awareness of reading and a keen desire to read," Mrs. Rice says, "most of the children in my group have had no contact with reading."

This is how she provides such contacts: by reading stories aloud; by using such devices as name cards, labels, and bulletin boards to pique the interest of non-readers; by printing a "morning newspaper" on the blackboard; by displaying a calendar; by setting up a library table.

● *Introducing essential reading techniques.* Mrs. Rice starts from scratch: she teaches the children how to hold a book and how to turn the pages.

From there, she works at helping the children acquire more refined skills, such as recognizing likenesses and differences in words and letters.

Says she: the real measure of success in this program is when, after the group finishes reading a story, a child exclaims, "Boy! This is a good book!" ■■

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